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Testimony of Rep. Gary Friedmann in support of

LD 1925, An Act to Improve Access to Grant Funding for the Maine Farms for the Future Program

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and honorable members of the Committee my name is Gary Friedmann and I represent House District 14, which includes Bar Harbor, Cranberry Isles, Lamoine and Mount Desert. I am here to testify in support of **LD 1925, An Act to Improve Access to Grant Funding for the Maine Farms for the Future Program**.

My wife is an owner and manager, with her partner Rose Avenia, of Bar Harbor Farm. She has been growing organic vegetables and flowers for 16 years for a Community Supported Agriculture program, serving 150 families, several local restaurants, food pantries and other wholesale accounts. I am the bookkeeper for this business.

I can tell you firsthand how important outside sources of capital funding are for small farms. This bill makes common sense improvements to the Farms for the Future program that will help new farmers succeed and for established farmers to prosper.

For many new and established farmers in Maine, leasing is an important and affordable way to access farmland. One out of five Maine farms lease some or all of the land they work.

It is important for farm businesses operating on leased land to be eligible for State programs like Farms for the Future that support the growth of farm businesses. However, investment support is currently only available to farmers who own at least 5 acres of land in agricultural use. This provision excludes some farmers from being able to participate fully in the program.

And since a requirement for receiving grants through the Farms for the Future Program is agreeing to protect your farmland from non-agricultural development for a set period of time, it makes sense to allow farms that are operating on land that is already protected by a permanent agricultural conservation easement to participate in the Program.

I urge your support for this bill and am happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.